

An aerial photograph showing a large area of allotments in Gainsborough. The plots are arranged in a grid-like pattern, with some plots showing signs of cultivation and others appearing as bare earth. There are some buildings and structures scattered throughout the area, including a large blue-roofed structure in the center-left. The overall scene is a mix of greenery and brown earth, indicating a working garden area.

Guide to Gardening

Gainsborough Town Council

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Welcome to Allotment Gardening

This allotment guide has been put together by Gainsborough Town Council to help new allotment holders get started and to get the best from their allotment garden.

Allotment gardening is a great outdoor activity to involve the whole family, with the added satisfaction of growing your own fruit, vegetables and cut flowers.

It provides the benefits of fresh air and healthy physical exercise and is a great way to introduce children to growing their own healthy, nutritious food.

An allotment garden is an excellent way to relieve stress and enjoy the benefits of a community environment for many allotment holders

.On your allotment site you will find experienced gardeners of all ages and many will be pleased to offer you advice and guidance and show you varied methods of achieving good crops, so if you are not sure, don't be afraid to ask.

Allotment gardens need a lot of time and commitment to get the best out of them and achieve results. However, everyone has a differing amount of time to work their allotment garden and someone working full time may not have as much time to tend the allotment garden as someone who is retired. When considering taking on an allotment you must be able to give enough time to look after the allotment garden as unattended allotment gardens soon become overrun with weeds putting your tenancy at risk.



The Allotment Garden

Taking on an allotment garden can seem daunting. Just remember that many of the allotment gardens around you are the result of years of hard work.

No matter how well the allotment garden has been looked after it will always have weeds. You need to work the soil and clear the weeds as soon as possible.

You might also want to sit down and plan out how you want your allotment garden arranged.

Planning your allotment garden

There are plenty of books and internet resources to help you with planning your allotment garden and guidance on the best conditions for different plants to flourish. You could also talk to the Site Secretary or other allotment garden holders.

Planning will help you to organize your allotment garden to make the best use of the space available. You might want to consider:

- Situation and light levels
- Ease of access for maintenance and watering
- Soil condition and drainage
- The space needed for plants to grow and flourish.
- Permanent planting areas
- Permanent features such as paths, utilities, buildings, etc.
- Crop rotation
- The tools and equipment you will need.

The National Allotment Society provides information about a range of issues. To find out more press the hyperlink or copy it into a browser: www.nsalg.org.uk/allotment-info/leaflets-2/

If you don't have access to the internet, please let us know and we may be able to supply a printed version of the information.

Getting started

To make the best of your allotment garden we would suggest that you plan and make a sketch plan of your allotment. This will help you plan what you are going to do each month.

The best way to start is by clearing your allotment garden. This can be quite a big task but bear in mind a wild allotment garden is telling you that the ground is fertile.

The key to clearing your allotment garden is little and often and not try to do too much at once.

Firstly, cut any grass and weeds down to ground level and then rake off and remove debris. Please consider composting where possible by creating a compost heap or having a compost bin on your allotment garden.

To help keep the weeds at bay you could cover with black plastic or cardboard and manure.

Mulches can help kill most weeds in the first year, but deep-rooted weeds may need digging out.

You could consider dividing your allotment garden into smaller areas which enable you to practice crop rotation.



Growing Crops

Growing from seed

Seed packets have printed instructions on how and when to sow flowers and vegetables these are guidelines only. Make your decision based on weather conditions.

There is a saying 'sow seeds generously: one for the rook, one for the crow, one to die and one to grow,' In other words, not all seeds germinate satisfactorily, so sow extra. If germination is good, you can always pick out unwanted seedlings and share and swap plants with other gardeners.

Early sowings of some crops can be done under glass, grown on and then the young plant transplanted out on the allotment. Others can be sown directly into the prepared seed bed.

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Growing Crops

How to sow seeds indoors

1 Fill small pots or seed trays with seed compost. Use a watering can fitted with a fine rose to moisten compost. Leave pots to drain.

2. Sprinkle seeds evenly and thinly over the surface of the compost leaving good space between seeds. Cover seeds with a thin layer of compost.

3. Cover the pot with a sheet of glass or an inverted polythene bag. Place it on a well-lit windowsill or in a heated propagator. Keep compost moist.

4. Remove the cover as seedlings emerge and continue to keep in a warm environment. They are ready to be 'picked' out when the first 'true' leaves emerge.

5. Only handle seedlings by their first seed leaves. Fill a seed tray with fresh compost and plant seedlings about 5cm apart, burying the root up to the base of the first leaves.



6. After six weeks the young plants will be large enough to pot up individually into 7.5cm pots. After a further three weeks transfer to larger pots or transplant



Growing Crops

How to sow seeds directly outside

1. Make a shallow drill in prepared soil using the end of a trowel.
Use a length of timber or line to create a straight drill. The smaller the seed the shallower the drill needs to be but check the seed packet.
2. Sow seeds along the drill at the space suggested on the seed packet.
Fine seeds can be thinned if you do end up sowing them too thickly.
3. Dribble water along the drill using a push soil in from either side of the drill to cover the seed, breaking up any large lumps of soil as you go. Pat the surface of the soil lightly to firm it in place.
4. Dribble water along the drill using a watering can or hose to settle the soil.
Keep the soil moist as seeds germinate and establish, removing any weeds that appear.



Tips

- Mark each end of seed drills so that you don't accidentally dig them up.
- Soak large seeds overnight to kick start the germination process.
- Mix fine seeds with a dry silver sand and dribble it into the seed drill from a folded piece of paper.

Growing crops

Vegetable plants

You can buy vegetable plants from local nurseries, although you will find you are limited to the varieties grown and available over the counter.

It is worth keeping an eye open on site as other allotment holders may have too many plants for their needs. If you have an excess of plants, you can potentially swap.

Companion planting

This is a method where, by planting certain types of plants in close proximity, you can help to protect them from pests and disease.

Over the next two pages a table shows a list of plants, their favoured companions and those plants you should not plant together.

Plants may be a good companion because:

- They like the same soil and weather conditions
- One helps the other by loosening the soil for its roots
- One gives welcome shade and protection to its companion
- One attracts an insect that is beneficial to the other
- One deters a pest that habitually attacks the other – for instance sage, rosemary and thyme repel the cabbage butterfly; onions and leeks repel the carrot fly
- One may leave a residue in the soil that benefits its companion

Companion Plants

Table of Companion Plants

Plant	Companions	Antagonist (don't plant near to plant)
Aubergine	Beans (dwarf and runner)	
Beetroot	Dwarf beans, kohlrabi, onion	Runner beans
Beans (broad)	Borage, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, potatoes, thyme	Onion family
Beans (dwarf)	Aubergine, beetroot, celery, potatoes, sweetcorn, cucumber, strawberries	Onion family
Beans (runner)	Marigold, marjoram, sweetcorn	Cabbage, onion, sunflowers
Broccoli	Broad beans, caraway, dill, mint, potatoes, rosemary, sage, thyme	Runner beans, strawberries, tomatoes
Brussel sprouts	Broad beans, caraway, dill, mint, potatoes, rosemary, sage, thyme	Runner beans, strawberries, tomatoes

Cabbage	Broad beans, caraway, dill, mint, potatoes, rosemary, sage, thyme	Runner beans, strawberries, tomatoes
Carrots	Broad beans, caraway, dill, mint, potatoes, rosemary, sage, thyme	Runner beans, strawberries, tomatoes

Continued

Plant	Companions	Antagonist (don't plant near to plant)
Cauliflower	Broad beans, caraway, dill, mint, potatoes, rosemary, sage, thyme	Runner beans, strawberries, tomatoes
Celery	Dwarf beans, cabbage family, leek, lettuce, tomatoes	
Courgette	Borage, fennel, nasturtium	Potatoes, rue
Garlic	Beetroot, carrots, lettuce, raspberries, roses, strawberries, tomatoes	Broad, dwarf and runner beans, peas
Kohl-rabi	Broad beans, beetroot, celery, chamomile, dill, mint, onion, potatoes, sage, thyme	Tomatoes
Leek	Carrots, celery	Broad, dwarf and runner beans
Lettuce	Carrots, celery, cucumber, garlic, radish, strawberries	Fennel, rue
Marrow	Borage, fennel, nasturtium, sweetcorn	Potatoes, sage, thyme
Mint	Cabbage family, peas, potatoes	
Onion	Beetroot, carrots, chamomile, parsnips, tomatoes	Broad, dwarf and runner beans
Parsley	Angelica, artichokes, asparagus, basil, lovage, potatoes, rhubarb, tomatoes	Lavender
Parsnips	Onions	
Peas	Broad, dwarf and runner beans, carrots, cucumber, mint, radish, sweetcorn, turnips	Garlic, horseradish, potatoes
Potatoes	Horseradish, lavender, lemon balm, marigold, marjoram, mint, parsley, valerian	Marrow family, peas, raspberries, sweetcorn
Pumpkin	Borage, nasturtium, sweetcorn	Potatoes
Radish	Catmint, chervil, cucumber, lettuce, nasturtium, peas	Summer savoury
Raspberries	Garlic, rue	Potatoes
Rhubarb	Parsley, spinach	
Squash	Borage, nasturtium, sweetcorn	Potatoes, rosemary, thyme
Strawberries	Borage, dwarf beans, garlic, lettuce, soya beans	Cabbage family
Swedes	Catmint, peas	
Sweetcorn	Dwarf beans, dill, marrow family, early	

	potatoes	
Tomatoes	Asparagus, basil, borage, carrots, celery, chives, lemon balm, marigold, nasturtium, onion, parsley	Cabbage family, potatoes
Turnips	Catmint, peas, radish, thyme	

Basic Growing Guide

January

January is the best time to plan what you are going to grow and order seeds and seed potatoes. Pick your winter crops and as soon as you are able start to dig over your allotment garden.

You can sketch out a plan of your allotment and plan where you would like to grow your fruit/vegetables.

If you get over to your allotment garden during milder days, you could cover empty beds with well-rotted manure or compost.

Start to chit seed potatoes when they arrive (allow them to start sprouting).

Broad Beans - if the ground is not frozen you can sow broad beans, otherwise sow in pots and keep undercover until you can plant out in the spring.

Garlic - this can be planted in mild areas if the soil is not frozen or waterlogged. You may have to wait until February or March if the conditions are not quite right.

Onions and Leeks - to give leeks and onions the longest possible growing season, you can sow the seeds in modules and keep indoors. These can be transplanted outdoor in March or April.

Peas - for an early crop of peas you can sow seeds in pots under glass and harden off to plant outdoors in March or April.

Rhubarb - you can plant new sets or divide and replant old crowns just ensure the ground isn't waterlogged.

February

You can continue your winter digging providing the ground isn't too frozen or too wet to work with.

You can harvest cabbages, brussel sprouts, leeks, parsnips and swede.

Chit seed potatoes, make sure if you haven't already purchased some to do so by the end of the month.

Plant or sow

Broad Beans - these can be sown directly outside.

Brussel sprouts and sprouting broccoli - sow early varieties under glass and plant out in April or May.

Lettuces - sow fast growing varieties indoors for an early crop in April or May. Thin out seedlings and plant in cold frames in March.

Spinach - sow fast growing varieties indoor and plant out in March for an early crop.

Tomato and cucumber - sow seeds indoors now and to ensure germination use a heated propagator.

March

As the weather begins to warm up you can now start planting and sowing outdoors. Prepare beds and remove any weeds which have survived over the winter.

Asparagus - you can grow this from seed, but it is easier to buy ready to plant rootstocks. Plant in prepared trenches.

Aubergines, peppers and chillies - these need as long as possible to ripen so start sowing these indoors this month to get ahead.

Broccoli and other brassicas - sow brussels outdoors and early cauliflower from seed could be planted out now but may still require some protection.

Herbs - coriander, fennel, oregano, dill and chives can be planted towards the end of the month.

Root and stem vegetables - these can now be sown outdoors but under cloches or frames.

Potatoes - these should now be able to be planted outside.

Strawberries - plant out cold stored runners as soon as they become available.

April

This is a good month to get ahead and sow seeds indoors or outside in a cold frame.

You can harvest spring cabbages, cauliflower, sprouting broccoli and any remaining leeks.

Plant

Carrots - you can now plant most root crops outdoors.

Celery - to ensure germination sow these indoors and harden off next month to plant out in June.

Pumpkins, courgettes and other squashes - these can be sown indoors for planting out next month.

Onions and leeks - these can now be sown outdoors.

Sweetcorn - it is worth getting this off to an early start by sowing seeds in pots indoors as sweetcorn has a long growing season.

You can also plant asparagus, herbs, peas, potatoes, broad beans, lettuce and other salad leaves.

May

This month can have higher temperatures with longer days and is the month to begin sowing and planting outdoors. Make sure you only transplant tender seedlings once the last chance of frost has gone. Harden off any plants indoors before planting out.

Cover any strawberries over night with cloches for an early crop but make sure to remove these during the day.

Make sure you keep the weeds at bay and younger plants well-watered.

Brussels, cauliflowers and red cabbage - when planting these make sure, that they are well spaced out as they grow quite large.

Celery - begin planting out this month.

Courgettes, pumpkins and squashes - plant these in soil which has been enriched with plenty of organic matter.

Leeks - this is normally the first month to transplant out leek plants.

Sweetcorn - you can now start to plant this out in blocks.

June

Mid point of the year and being the end of spring and the start of summer it offers the last opportunity to sow many seeds. This month does also offer the opportunity to harvest some crops. Unfortunately, now is the time where it is more likely you will suffer attacks from birds, insects, slugs and snails.

You can now think about harvesting peas, early potatoes, broad beans, beetroot, onions, summer salad and strawberries.

It is a good idea to keep a careful watch for pests and to protect your crops appropriately.

Aubergines - plant these out by the end of the month to give them as much growing time as possible.

Cabbages and Brussel sprouts - plant out the first winter cabbages and sprouts.

Cauliflower - any sown in spring should be planted out now.

Chillies and peppers - if the danger of frost has passed then plant them out after hardening off.

Courgettes, pumpkins, marrow and squashes - plant out and allow plenty of space and keep them well watered.

July

Temperatures are likely to be at their highest and you should now be able to start harvesting from your allotment garden. This can be a dry month so watering is crucial as most crops require a steady unbroken supply of water.

Keep weeding regularly to keep weeds at bay.

Before harvesting garlic, shallots and onions dry these out. Loosen the soil around the roots, lift the bulbs and lie on the soil surface in the sun.

The drier they are the longer they will keep.

Cabbages - this is the time to start sowing cabbages for next spring and is the last chance to plant out winter cabbages, autumn cauliflowers and brussels.

French beans and peas - July is the last chance to plant these as the pods are unlikely to develop if planted any later.

Leeks - finish transplanting these out.

Salad crops - sow more lettuce, rocket and salad leaves for an ongoing supply in autumn.

August

Almost everything should now be coming to fruition and daily trips to your allotment garden should see you returning home with potatoes, carrots, peppers, sweetcorn, peas, onions and tomatoes.

Continue to regularly water your crops and keep up the weeding.

Make sure you regularly harvest courgettes and runner beans.

Earth up potatoes and around brassicas to support unsteady stems.

Any strawberry runners can now be pegged down to root, then potted up ready to transplant.

There is little to sow or plant now however, as space becomes vacant from harvested crops you can begin to plant out overwintering crops.

Cauliflowers - this is the time to transplant spring and winter cabbages. If they overwinter successfully, they should give you a harvest in the new year.

Broccoli and cabbages - you can sow a few more cabbages for harvesting in the spring in a temporary seed beds or pots until you have space available. Cover with nets to protect from pests.

Lettuce and salad crops - it is possible to sow lettuce although they may not germinate if the weather is too hot.

September

This month marks the start of autumn and all of your early crops should now be coming to an end. Later crops will now be coming in to harvest and you should be lifting main crop potatoes and pulling leeks..

Cabbages - spring cabbages should now be transplanted this month or next into their final growing position.

Onions - overwintering onion sets can now be planted. Make sure the ground is well prepared before planting.

Strawberries - plant any new strawberry plants

October

As the days start to get shorter and the temperatures start to drop it is likely there will be early frosts.

Now is the time to start clearing up and composting anything left from summer's harvest.

Lift root vegetables where possible and store.

Broad beans - early varieties can now be sown for overwintering and should give you a crop in June.

Cabbages - this will be your last chance to transplant cabbages and make sure you plant out in firmed ground and protect from pests.

Garlic - as long as the ground is not waterlogged then garlic can be planted.

November and December.

Carry out winter digging and clear weeds. This is a good time to apply compost or well-rotted manure to beds and get the ground prepared for next year's planting

Crop Rotation

If you grow the same crop in the same place year after year you will get a build up of pests and diseases specific to that crop. Different crops take different levels of nutrients from the soil and inevitably over time the nutrients become unbalanced.

This is often referred to 'sick soil' and even the addition of fertilisers is unlikely to help, since it is likely the trace elements are depleted.

The simplest rule of crop rotation is not to grow the same thing in the same place two years running. In fact, the wider the gap between particular crops occupying the same piece of ground the better.

The list below should help you identify what crops need to go together in the crop rotation.

Brassica – cabbages, cauliflowers, kale, broccoli, swede, turnips, radish and mustard

Solanaceae – the potato family, which also includes tomatoes and aubergines

Legumes – the bean family, anything with 'bean' in the name, runner, french, broad bean and peas.

Alliums – the onion family, leeks, shallots, garlic

Cucurbit – includes cucumbers, marrows, courgettes and pumpkins.

Umbelliferae – this includes carrots, parsnips and celery.

Details of basic rotation

- Brassica follow legumes
- Legumes follow a manured crop
- Never manure carrots or parsnips
- If any bed contains white rot or club rot, avoid planting onions and brassicas in that area

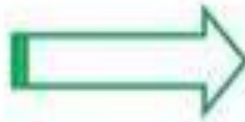
Please refer to the coloured chart on the next page to show an example of a three-year crop rotation plan.

ROOTS

- beetroot
- carrots
- celery, celeriac
- chard
- parsnips
- parsley
- spinach
- potatoes

Remove any stones. If soil is heavy, add grit or sharp sand for better drainage. No compost, manure or lime.

3-YEAR PLOT ROTATION



BRASSICAS

- broccoli,
- brussels sprouts
- cabbage
- cauliflower
- kale, kohlrabi
- pak choi, radish
- swede, turnip
- rocket, salad leaves

Add manure or compost in the spring. If soil is acidic, add lime at least 3 weeks before planting.

EVERYTHING ELSE

- all kinds of beans
- peas, sugar snaps
- mangetout
- onions, shallots
- garlic, leeks
- courgettes, squash
- melons, pumpkins
- peppers, chillies
- sweetcorn

Spread a thick layer of well-rotted compost or leaf mould over soil in autumn or winter (mulch).



Fertilisers

The basics you need to know are that nitrogen encourages green leafy growth, and potassium (also called potash) promotes flowering. So anything you want to grow, where the main part you eat is the leaf, like say a lettuce or spinach loves nitrogen, and anything that needs a flower to produce the part you eat, such as tomatoes and other fruits, also need nitrogen, but a reasonable dose of potassium, to encourage the flowers to make the fruit.

Natural sources of vegetable garden fertilisers come from the following:

- Chicken manure – available as dry pellets, typically high in nitrogen and quite strong so has to be used with care
- Sheep manure
- Cow and Horse manure - are weaker and generally used as soil conditioner and not a great food source for plants
- Blood and bone mixes – sold commercially as a powder and can vary in nutritional value, so check labels and compare brands
- Green manure
- Grow more – commercial multipurpose fertiliser which can be used as plant food during the growing season and has the major nutrients required
- Nitrate of chalk – a quick acting, growth promoting fertilizer in granular form. It contains some lime which reduces the acidity. It is good for brassicas and root vegetables.

Feeding the soil

Natural plant foods

If you want to save money there are many ways of making your own plant food, some examples are detailed below.

Banana skins contain a long list of nutrients. Digging a banana skin just beneath the surface near roses will provide food of which many soils are deficient.

Most vegetables like a drop of beer now and again, none more than brassicas, say once a week. It's excellent for flowers too, especially delphiniums and hollyhocks.

Tea leaves are a good addition to the compost heap.

Nettles – you don't like to see them growing on your plot, but they take up and store nutrients from the soil. You can make a liquid fertilizer by soaking nettles in a container of rainwater for a month, diluting it 1:10 and pouring it around the roots of your crops.

Leaf mould – this requires patience. Fill a large plastic bag with fallen leaves, make a few small holes in the bag and fold over the top, leave to stand for six months and it will be ready to use. This will enrich dry, stony soil.

Bean and pea roots – when beans and peas have stopped cropping, cut off the tops just above the soil and leave the roots in the soil. They contain a lot of nutrients and will replenish the soil.

Comfrey – a liquid compost or comfrey tea – Comfrey can be made into a liquid feed. Take a container, add comfrey leaves, fill with water and leave for 3-5 weeks. The liquid produced can be used as a tomato feed but be warned it doesn't smell very pleasant!



Water Conservation

To have your own convenient supply of water, all you need is guttering fitted to your sheds and greenhouses with a down pipe into a water butt. Water butts can be easily connected to each other.

You may think that you have to water all your crops every day, but this is not the case, even in hot conditions. It is better to water a section well one day and another section the following day. Lightly watering the whole plot is not productive as the water will not penetrate the soil far enough.

Different plants need a different amount of watering. Over watering can be as harmful as under watering so it is worth getting to know how much and when. In some cases, over watering can lead to weak plants. Plants watered correctly will form strong roots and develop a better plant.

Watering Guide

Broad beans	Watering should not be necessary before flowers appear. When the pods are swelling water in dry weather
French beans	Spraying flowers is not necessary. Water during or after the flowering period in dry weather
Runner beans	Water in dry weather when the pods have formed
Beetroot	Dryness leads to woodiness and low yields – a sudden return to wet conditions can lead to splitting. To avoid these problems water moderately at fortnightly intervals during dry weather
Broccoli	When planting young plants water well. Then only need to water in dry weather
Brussels	When planting young plants water well. A mature crop rarely needs water
Cabbage	When planting young plants water well. Then water if the weather is dry
Cauliflower	Must never be kept short of water, especially in early stages of growth
Carrots	Water only in periods of drought
Leeks	Water only in dry weather
Lettuce	When planting young plants water well. Always water in the morning or midday, watering in the evening will increase the chance of disease
Marrow, courgette, squash and pumpkin	Water regularly around the plants, not over them
Onions	Water only in periods of drought
Parsnip, swede, turnips	Water only in dry weather
Peas	Water in dry spells in the summer months
Potato	Water only in dry weather



We hope you have found this allotment guide useful.

Now that you have considered all of the above and have decided to take on an allotment garden, please ensure you fully read and understand the Allotment Tenancy Agreement and Gainsborough Town Council Allotment Policies, you can access them here,

<https://gainsborough-tc.gov.uk/council-services/allotments-information-agreement/>

Useful contact details.

Gainsborough Town Council, Richmond House,
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Email: allotments@gainsborough-tc.gov.uk
Website: allotments@gainsborough-tc.gov.uk

The National Allotment Society: www.nsalg.org.uk/allotment-info/leaflets-2/

Allotment Garden: www.allotment-garden.org